RecfishCENTRAL Submission

Management options for King George Whiting in South Australia’s recreational fishing sector

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April 2016

ABSTRACT

This submission represents the views of members of RecfishCENTRAL which is the growing voice of South Australia’s recreational fishing community, small business, charter operators and the tourism industry. It is the submission on the management options for King George Whiting in South Australia’s recreational fishing sector.

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Management Changes have been proposed for the King George Whiting fishery east of Longitude 136 degrees.

PREFACE

RecfishCENTRAL finds the arguments presented in your paper titled ‘Management options for King George Whiting in South Australia’ to be ill-conceived and lacking necessary analytical scientific data on the state of the biomass in the various regions under consideration.

It in fact is not a management option for the whole of South Australia but for those regions east of Longitude 136 degrees. (basically a line drawn through the centre of the state from Port Lincoln)

There is no supporting scientific data to be found on spawning areas, times of spawning aggregations for King George Whiting west of Longitude 136 degrees except the comment that this region’s KGW fishery is sustainable.

That comment doesn’t explain why the region is exempt from the proposed management arrangements for KGW.

The arguments put by RecfishCENTRAL below will highlight the inequity of the proposed arrangements between the commercial sector and recreational fishers, knowing that the majority of the annual commercial harvest of KGW comes from west of Longitude 136 degrees.

This ‘West Coast’ region, because of its distance, is fished only by a small number of recreational fishers, leaving virtually all of the KGW in this region to commercial fishers.

As our arguments will be put you have presumed that the harvest of KGW by the recreational sector attained 58% of the total state catch in 2013-14 was solely due to the effort of recreational fishers.

Your assumptions did not take into account the large reduction in the number of commercial fishers fishing the resource. A total of 700 licences down to 304 in 2013-14.

As we will highlight your own research shows a significant decline in commercial fishing effort during this period and the disparity in catch data cannot be fully attributed to the recreational sector.
King George Whiting

RecfishCENTRAL does not support any of the proposed changes for King George Whiting in the recreational sector. It will review its position once there is a commitment to more robust research to monitor the status of the species and the immediate introduction of a Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) quota on the commercial fishing sector.

If individual quotas are introduced for commercial fishers on this resource then those quotas or parts thereof should not be transferable to other commercial fishers.

Rationale

The Management options paper for King George Whiting in South Australia is based on information gathered from the 2013-14 SA Recreational fishing survey.

This survey is severely flawed because of the extremely poor core sample that actually completed the diary process.

PIRSA representatives at the public meeting it organised in WALLAROO in February 2016 stated the proposed new changes came from ‘statistically robust information’ via ‘its’ diary survey. This implies the survey was done in SA.

However when questioned the PIRSA Fisheries Policy and Management Unit program leader, Keith Rowling agreed the survey was conducted by Victorian Fisheries representatives. The source was also highlighted on the cover page of the SA Recreational Fishing Survey 2013-14.

He also agreed that only 392 of the 561 diarists who completed the full survey had actually fished during the 12 month period. This admission while still claiming PIRSA is basing their recommendations on ‘statistically robust information’.

Keith Rowling agreed the proposed 40cm maximum size limit for King George Whiting was nothing more than an ambit claim that PIRSA may withdraw further into the process in order to have its other proposed changes accepted.

In the data it states 17% is the standard error in the number of King George Whiting harvested during the period. The data catch says Recreational fishers caught 367 tonnes or 58.1% of the total harvest weight. With your Standard error could this mean recs only accounted for 41% of the total harvest weight, or 75% of the total harvest weight? (SA Recreational Fishing Survey 2013-14.)

PIRSA acknowledges this when it states existing management arrangements (amalgamation scheme, netting closures, netting buyback, owner operator controls and restrictions on the number of masters) have resulted in declining
effort and catch of King George Whiting. (Management options for KGW in SA 2016 PIRSA Pg 15)

Lack of credible data for the King George Whiting resource was further demonstrated when SA Research and Development Institute’s Dr. Tony Fowler claimed the distribution of large King George Whiting above 30cm was virtually confined to an area south of Corny Point to Kangaroo Island where they congregated to breed.

When questioned from the floor that King George Whiting between 35-50cm were routinely caught between Cape Elizabeth, Port Victoria and beaches south to Corny Point the scientist claimed these were not breeding fish.

Fishers know that King George Whiting continue to breed up to their life span of 22 years reaching more than 60cm.

Proposed Changes

Which proposed management option/s do you support and why?

- **Implement a maximum size limit to complement the existing minimum size limit (i.e. a slot limit)**

  RecfishCENTRAL does not support this option because of the reasons outlined in its rationale.

  Slot limits have not worked in other fisheries because of the large mortality of returned fish above the maximum size. Targeting a specific age group within a biomass has long-term consequences for the future sustainability of the stock.

  If a maximum size limit was implemented as proposed you will have less aged breeding stock reaching the maximum size in future years, actually defeating your arguments on why you proposed such a plan in the first place.

- **Implement spawning spatial and seasonal closures**

  RecfishCENTRAL does not support this option for the reasons outlined in its rationale.

  Although it might appear to be a reasonable method to increase the biomass PIRSA doesn’t actually know what the current biomass is.

  Unlike Snapper, KGW inhabits the same fishing grounds as other species such as flathead, red mullet etc and would become bycatch during any
proposed closure. High levels of mortality would result, through barotraumas because of the depths at which they breed.

PIRSA’s claims about market prices are curious and nonsensical. I note that under the heading Impacts PIRSA claims market prices may fall for a short period of time once the fishery re-opens after the closure if markets are over supplied; however fishing for King George Whiting in waters west of longitude 136°E outside of the spatial closures would be permitted during this period, which would reduce the likelihood of this impact. (Management options for KGW in SA Pg 13)

So it is evident this is one of the reasons the KGW fishery west of longitude 136 degrees is not included in the current management options.

- **Reduction of the recreational bag and boat limits**

RecfishCENTRAL does not support this option for reasons outlined in its rationale.

The organisation believes that recreational fishers who have maintained their harvest of the species pretty much at the same level for the last survey periods (according to the ‘diary’ survey) are being disadvantaged by poor unscientific conclusions.

The decline in commercial fishing effort in the fishery does not equate to a conclusion that recreational fishers account for 58% of the state catch.

PIRSA proposes to adjust the allocated share levels based on smoke and mirrors.

From the period the initial allocations were made there has been a dramatic drop in the number of commercial fishers actually fishing the resource. (304 MSF fishers).

The declines are most evident for Spencer Gulf and Gulf St Vincent. The falling catches reflect declines in targeted effort for each of the main gear types of handlines, gill nets and hauling nets, which reflect reductions in the numbers of commercial fishers who target King George Whiting with the different gear types. (Status of South Australian Fisheries Report 2014)

SA’s recreational fishers are being unfairly targeted given the average amateur reels in just 1.3kg of King George whiting each per year as opposed to about one tonne per professional. (SA Recreational Fishing Survey 2013-14)
- **Increase minimum size limit**

RecfishCENTRAL **does not support this option** for reasons outlined in its rationale.

This option clearly demonstrates a lack of understanding of the distribution of year classes of the biomass.

However SA Research and Development Institute’s Dr. Tony Fowler did tell the Wallaroo public meeting in February 2016 that the distribution of large King George Whiting above 30cm was virtually confined to an area south of Corny Point to Kangaroo Island where they congregated to breed.

Using PIRSA’s option of increasing the size limit to 32 cm would mean, based on Dr. Fowler’s understanding, that all areas north of Corny Point in both Gulfs would not be able to catch King George Whiting, because they would be less than 32 cm.

Recreational fishers who are out amongst the fish stocks know that is not the case, and PIRSA could test their assumptions if they performed actual field data collection, and monitored actual fish catches rather than using monitoring.

In northern Spencer Gulf such as Port Broughton recreational fishers rarely catch a KGW above 34-35 cm. So under this proposal they’d actually have a slot limit of 32-35 cm.

The stocks need real field data collection rather than desktop computer analysis to determine the real state of the biomass.

PIRSA says assessment of the status of the South Australian stocks uses a weight-of-evidence approach that considers commercial catch-and-effort data, recreational fishery data, biological information on population size and age structures, and output from a computer fishery model that integrates these main input datasets. (Status of key Australian fish stocks reports 2014 King George Whiting).

Again RecfishCENTRAL calls for proper scientific data collection before the introduction of any new fish management or share allocation levels.

- **Commercial effort day limits or catch quotas**

RecfishCENTRAL **supports** the immediate introduction of Total Allowable Commercial Catch quotas for King George Whiting.

The TACC should be apportioned between each licence holder and that individuals given annual quota cannot be transferred if for whatever reason they do not harvest their quota.

Given the circumstances that this review is only for the KGW fishery east of longitude 136 degrees a conundrum exists for PIRSA.
When allocating the division of ‘allocated shares’ between the recreational sector and the commercial sector does the West Coast region get excluded in this distribution?

RecfishCENTRAL can see a legal problem here if the West Coast region is exempt from the Management Options for King George Whiting in SA.

_Could any of the options in the paper have economic and/or social impacts on you or your community? If so, what could these impacts be?

The economic value of recreational fishing in Australia can be quantified and expressed in billions of dollars.

However its value to the nation in terms of social benefits is harder to define. This contributes to the lack of recognition by government of the importance of supporting and encouraging participation in recreational fishing. (Recreational fishing in Australia - 2011 and beyond: a national industry development strategy- Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee)

It has been estimated that there are 90,000 jobs supported by recreational fishing nationally compared with around 16,000 jobs in commercial fishing, hunting, trapping and aquaculture in 2006. (ABARE-ABS 2010: Australian fisheries statistics 2009: Canberra)

In May 1997, PIRSA Fisheries and Aquaculture published the results of an extensive survey of recreational fishing in South Australia, undertaken by the Marketing Science Centre of the University of South Australia (Marketing Science Centre 1997 Pg 3)

Its conclusions showed :-

- The annual recurrent expenditure of recreational fishers in SA was $350 million
- The investment in fishing tackle by recreational fishers was $219 million
- The replacement value of boats owned by recreational fishers aged over 15 was $893 million and the total capital investment in recreational fishing boats and tackle was $1.112 billion in South Australia.

This indicates that the recreational fishing sector in South Australia is a substantial contributor to the state’s economy both in terms of direct financial impact and employment. It does not indicate the social health benefits across the state.

Any major reduction to the harvest strategies for recreational fishers in this state will have significant negative impacts on the fishers but also the down-
stream effects on the bait and tackle industry, charter boats, tourism industry and most importantly to regional centres which rely heavily on recreational fishing activity.

PIRSA claims any changes may have a financial impact for the broader recreational industry, such as tackle shops and other associated businesses (Management options for KGW in SA 2016 PIRSA Pg 14).

It also claims there’ll be potential impacts on recreational fishing holidays and associated regional tourism located near to the spawning areas, noting that the closures would be most effective between March and May, or April. These are among the peak holiday breaks for Adelaide Cup, Easter and Anzac Day.

RecfishCENTRAL acknowledges that sustainability of the fish stocks is a consideration and asserts that recreational fishers are already self-regulating to ensure that sustainability.

It is unfathomable why PIRSA and a responsible Government would even consider suggesting changes to fish management that would impact on what is a valuable contributor to the economy of regional areas. Especially when the basis for those changes lacks scientific rigour.

Recent research has shown many South Australians visit Yorke Peninsula on intrastate holidays. (Yorke Peninsula Country Times. Mar 22nd 2016 P 4) The findings by Roy Morgan revealed 59.1% of state residents spent their holiday within the state and 9.4% visited Yorke Peninsula.

This meant that Yorke Peninsula had potentially more than 100,000 visitors to the region over the recent Easter break from Mar 25-28th. Most of these visitors came to fish.

Conservatively if they spent on average $500 each for accommodation, food, bait, fishing gear, fuel, boat ramp fees, and other associated costs for fishing during the four days this represented $50 million just for this break.

Anecdotal research by RecfishCENTRAL of small businesses, tourism operators, holiday rentals, charter operators and supermarkets estimate the impact of the current Management proposals for the recreational fishing sector will have a negative 20% hit to their bottom line.

A 20% reduction in the income to regional businesses will be a body blow as many have not recovered from the global financial crisis. Some will face closure and the impacts on regional unemployment, already at an alarming high, will continue to put pressure on those regional communities.

PIRSA needs to think much more broadly than the confines of its Management Plan when considering to push ahead with these proposed changes.
REFERENCES

SA Recreational Fishing Survey 2013-14.

Management options for KGW in SA 2016 PIRSA Pg 15

Management options for KGW in SA 2016 PIRSA Pg 13

Status of South Australian Fisheries Report 2014

Status of key Australian fish stocks reports 2014 King George Whiting

Recreational fishing in Australia - 2011 and beyond: a national industry development strategy- Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee


Marketing Science Centre of the University of South Australia (Marketing Science Centre 1997 Pg 3)

Yorke Peninsula Country Times. Mar 22nd 2016 P 4